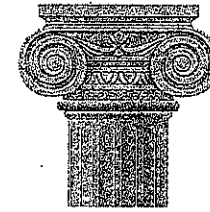


into the previously trouble-free world of men by removing the lid from the jar or box the gods had filled for her. Hesiod then refers to Pandora's descendants, the female sex, as a "beautiful evil" for men ever after, comparing them to drones who live off the toil of other bees while devising mischief at home. But, he goes on to say, any man who refuses to marry to escape the "troublesome deeds of women" will come to "destructive old age" without any children to care for him (*Theogony*, lines 603-605). After his death, moreover, his relatives will divide his property among themselves. A man must marry, in other words, so that he can sire children to serve as his support system in his old age and to preserve his holdings after his death by inheriting them. Women, according to Greek mythology, were for men a necessary evil, but the reality of women's lives in the city-state incorporated social and religious roles of enormous importance.

## FIVE

### Oligarchy, Tyranny, and Democracy



Although the Greek city-states differed in size and natural resources, over the course of the Archaic Age they came to share certain fundamental political institutions and social traditions: citizenship, slavery, the legal disadvantages and political exclusion of women, and the continuing predominance of wealthy elites in public life. But city-states developed these shared characteristics in strikingly different ways. Monarchy had mostly died out in Greece with the end of Mycenaean civilization, as the limited evidence for the time seems to show. In any case, the dual kingship that existed in Sparta formed part of its complex oligarchic system rather than functioning as a monarchy in the ordinary sense, which has only one ruler at a time and does not impose the complex and strict requirements for power sharing under which the Spartan "kings" operated. In Sparta and some other Greek city-states, a limited number of men from the citizen body exercised meaningful political power, thus creating a political system called an oligarchy (*oligarchia* in Greek, meaning "rule by the few"). Other city-states experienced periods of domination by the kind of sole ruler who seized power in some irregular, even violent way and whom the Greeks called a tyrant (from the Greek *tyrannos*). Tyranny, passed down from father to son, existed at various times across the breadth of the Greek world, from city-states on the island of Sicily in the west, to Samos off the coast of Ionia in the east, though most of these regimes failed to stay in control for more than a couple of generations.

- c. 800–600 B.C.: Spartans develop their society's distinctive laws and traditions.
- c. 730–710 B.C.: Spartans invade Messenia in First Messenian War.
- c. 657 B.C.: Cypselus, of the Bacchiad family, becomes tyrant at Corinth.
- c. 640–630 B.C.: Spartans invade Messenia in Second Messenian War. Athenians begin to develop the initial stages of democratic government.
- c. 632 B.C.: In Athens, Cylon attempts to take over the government by force.
- c. 630 B.C.: Sappho of Lesbos born.
- 625 B.C.: Cypselus dies and is succeeded by his son, Periander, as tyrant of Corinth.
- 621 B.C.: Draco creates code of law for Athens.
- 594 B.C.: Athenians appoint Solon to recodify their laws in an attempt to put an end to social and economic conflict.
- 546 B.C.: Pisistratus becomes tyrant at Athens on his third attempt.
- c. 540 B.C.: Tyranny begins on Samos.
- c. 530 B.C.: Pythagoras emigrates from Samos to southern Italy.
- 527 B.C.: Pisistratus dies; his son Hippias takes over as tyrant of Athens.
- 510 B.C.: Athens freed from tyranny by Alcmaeonid family and Spartan military force.
- 508 B.C.: Cleisthenes begins to reform Athenian democracy; Spartan invasion turned back by "the people."

Still other city-states created early forms of democracy (*dēmokratia*, "rule by the people") by giving all male citizens the power to participate in governing. This was an extraordinary new form of government; its creation has a significance that modern people can miss if they assume from their own experience that democracy is the "default value" of human political organization. Assemblies of men with some influence on the king had existed in some early states in the ancient Near East, as a wise king always sought out good advisors and kept his finger on the pulse of his people in general, but Greek democracy broke unprecedented new ground with the amount of political power that it invested in its male citizen body. The Athenians established Greece's most renowned democracy, in which the individual freedom of male citizens flourished to a degree never before seen in the ancient world and rarely since. These diverging paths of political and social development in the city-state reveal the extent of the challenges that Greeks faced as they struggled to construct a new way of life during the Archaic Age, reinventing their politics to support a grow-



Fig. 5.1: This sixth-century B.C. Spartan vase shows Arkesilas, ruler of the Greek settlement of Cyrene in North Africa, overseeing the weighing of goods for export/import trade by sea. This sort of international commerce helped stimulate the growth of Greek city-states in the Archaic Age, especially those with good harbors to accommodate freight-carrying ships. Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons.

ing population through agriculture and trade (fig. 5.1). In the course of this struggle, innovative thinkers also began to formulate new ways of understanding the physical world, their relations to it, and their relationships with each other; the novelty of their ideas in philosophy and natural science echoed the newness of the developments in politics.

### EARLY SPARTA

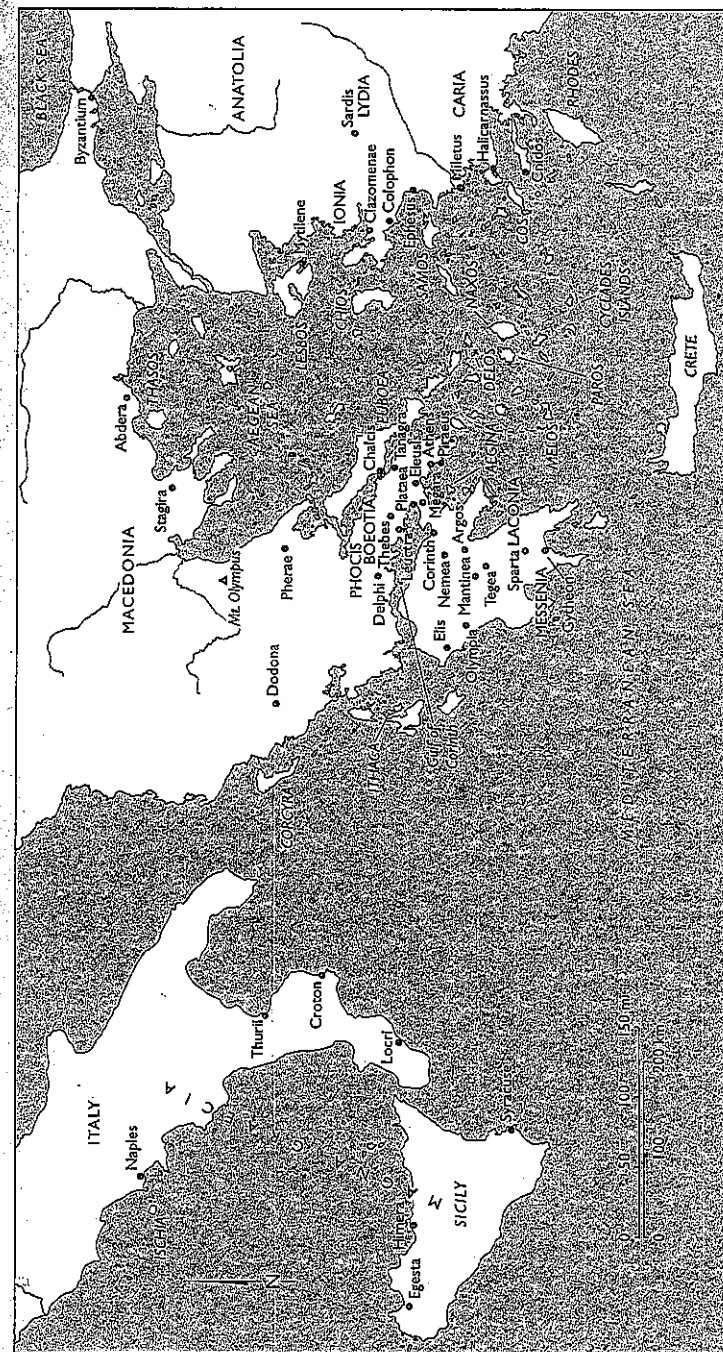
The Spartans made oligarchy the political base for a society devoted to military readiness. The Spartan way of life became internationally famous for its discipline, which showed most prominently in the Spartan infantry, the most powerful military force in Greece during the Archaic Age. Sparta's easily defended location gave it a secure base for developing its might, as it was nestled on a narrow north-south plain between rugged mountain ranges in the southeastern Peloponnese, in a region called Laconia (hence the regional designation of Spartans as Laconians; as Spar-

tans, they could also be called Lacedaimonians, from the alternative name Lacedaimon applied to Sparta). The city-state had access to the sea through Gytheon, a harbor situated some twenty-five miles south of its urban center, but this port opened onto a dangerous stretch of the Mediterranean whipped by treacherous currents and winds. As a consequence, enemies could not threaten the Spartans by sea, but their relative isolation from the sea also kept the Spartans from becoming adept sailors. Their strength and their interests remained tied to the land.

The Greeks believed the ancestors of the Spartans were Dorians who had invaded the Peloponnese from central Greece and defeated the original inhabitants of Laconia around 950 B.C., but, as said before, archaeology indicates that no single "Dorian invasion" took place. The inhabitants of Laconia in historical times spoke the Dorian dialect of Greek, but no secure evidence exists to identify their earliest origins. At first the Spartans settled in at least four small villages, two of which apparently dominated the others. These early settlements later cooperated to form the core of what would in the Archaic Age become the polis of the Spartans. The Greeks gave the name "synoecism" ("union of households") to this process of political unification. In a synoecism, most people continued to live in their original villages even after one settlement began to serve as the main urban center of the new city-state. (Synoecism could also take place by everyone moving to a central location.) Over time, this unification turned Sparta into the most powerful community in Laconia; the Spartans then used this power to conquer the other Greeks in the region. We cannot determine the chronology of this extension of Spartan power over Laconia and then to Messenia to the west in the Peloponnese, but its consequences for Spartan life were grave and enduring, as will be explained below.

One apparent result of the compromises required to forge Spartan unity was that the Spartans retained not one but two hereditary military leaders of high prestige, whom they called kings. These kings, who had perhaps originally been the chiefs of the two dominant villages, served as the religious heads of Sparta and commanders of its army. The kings did not hold unrestricted power to make decisions or set policy, however, because they operated not as pure monarchs but rather as leaders of the oligarchic institutions governing the Spartan city-state. Rivalry between the two royal families periodically led to fierce disputes, and the initial custom of having two supreme military commanders also paralyzed the Spartan army when the kings disagreed on strategy in the middle of a military campaign. The Spartans therefore eventually decided that only one king at a time would command the army when the troops marched out to war.

The "few" who made policy in Sparta were a group of twenty-eight



Map 4. Magna Graecia, Greece, and Anatolia

men over sixty years old, joined by the two kings. This group of thirty, called the "council of elders" (*gerousia*) formulated proposals that were submitted to an assembly of all free adult males. This assembly had only limited power to amend the proposals put before it; mostly it was expected to approve the council's plans. Rejections were rare because the council retained the right to withdraw a proposal when the reaction to it by the male citizens in the assembly indicated that a negative vote was likely. "If the people speak crookedly," Spartan tradition stated, "the elders and the leaders of the people shall be withdrawers [of the proposal]" (Plutarch, *Lycurgus* 6). The council could then bring the proposal back on another occasion after there had been time to rally support for its passage.

A board of five annually elected "overseers" (*ephors*) counterbalanced the influence of the kings and the *gerousia*. Chosen from the adult male citizens at large, the *ephors* convened the *gerousia* and the assembly; they exercised considerable judicial powers of judgment and punishment. They could even bring charges against a king and imprison him until his trial. The creation of the board of *ephors* diluted the political power of the oligarchic *gerousia* and the kings because the job of the *ephors* was to ensure the supremacy of law. The Athenian Xenophon later reported: "All men rise from their seats in the presence of the king, except for the *ephors*. The *ephors* on behalf of the polis and the king on his own behalf swear an oath to each other every month: the king swears that he will exercise his office according to the established laws of the polis, and the polis swears that it will preserve his kingship undisturbed if he abides by his oath" (*Constitution of the Spartans* 15.6-7).

The Spartans insisted that obedience to the law was the requirement for meeting their society's rigid standards of proper behavior on matters large and small. When the *ephors* entered office, for example, they issued an official proclamation to the men of Sparta: "Shave your mustache and obey the laws" (Plutarch, *Agis and Cleomenes* 9). The depth of Spartans' respect for their system of government under law was symbolized by their tradition that Apollo of Delphi had sanctioned it with an oracle called the *Rhetra*. A legendary Spartan leader named *Lycurgus*, they said, had instituted the reforms that the *Rhetra* institutionalized. Even in antiquity, historians had no firm information about the dates of *Lycurgus*'s leadership or precisely how he changed Spartan laws. All we can say today is that the Spartans evolved their law-based political and social system during the period from about 800 to 600 B.C. Unlike other Greeks, the Spartans never had their laws written down. Instead, they preserved their system from generation to generation with a distinctive, highly structured way

of life based on a special economic foundation that exploited the coerced labor of others.

### SPARTAN NEIGHBORS AND SLAVES

The distinctiveness of the Spartan way of life was fundamentally a reaction to their living surrounded by people whom they had conquered in war and enslaved to exploit economically but who outnumbered them greatly. To maintain their superiority over their conquered and hostile neighbors, from whom they extracted food and labor, Spartan men had to turn themselves into a society of soldiers constantly on guard. They accomplished this transformation by a radical restructuring of traditional family life enforced by strict adherence to the laws and customs governing practically all aspects of behavior. Art, literature, and entertainment became restricted to the reinforcement of communal values of loyalty to the group and obedience to the laws. Through constant daily reinforcement of their strict code of values, the Spartans ensured their survival against the enemies they had created by subjugating their fellow Greeks in the southern Peloponnese. The seventh-century B.C. poet *Tyrtaeus*, whose verses spill over with mythological references showing the literary refinement of the poetry produced in early Sparta before its military culture began to exclude such accomplishments, expressed that code in his ranking of courage in battle as the supreme male value: "I would never remember or mention in my work any man for his speed as a runner or his wrestling skill, not if he was as huge and strong as a Cyclops or could run faster than the North Wind, or more handsome than *Tithonus* or richer than *Midas* or *Cinyras*, or more kingly than *Pelops*, or had speech more honeyed than *Adrastus*, not even if he possessed every glory—not unless he had the strength of a warrior in full combat mode" (Fragment 12).

Some of the conquered inhabitants of Laconia did not become slaves and were allowed to continue to live in self-governing communities. Called literally "those who live round about" (*perioikoi*), which might also be translated as "neighbors," these Laconians were required to serve in the Spartan army and pay taxes; they were included under the name "Lacedaemonians." Still, they lacked citizen rights at Sparta. Perhaps because they retained their personal freedom and property, however, the *perioikoi* almost never rebelled against Spartan control. Far different was the fate of the large number of conquered people in the Peloponnese who had to endure enslavement as *helots*, a term derived from the Greek for "being captured." Later ancient commentators described the *helots* as "between

slave and free" (Pollux, *Onomasticon* 3.83) because they were not the personal property of individual Spartans but rather slaves belonging to the whole community, which alone could free them. Helots had a semblance of family life because they were expected to produce children to maintain the size of their population, which was compelled to labor as farmers and household slaves as a way of freeing Spartan citizens from any need to do such work. Spartan men in fact wore their hair very long to show they were warriors of high status rather than laborers, for whom long hair was an inconvenience.

When the arable land of Laconia proved too small to support the full citizen population of Sparta, the Spartans attacked their Greek neighbors in the southwestern part of the Peloponnesian peninsula, the Messenians. In the First Messenian War (c. 730–710 B.C.) and then in the Second (c. 640–630 B.C.), the Spartan army captured the territory of Messenia, which amounted to 40 percent of the Peloponnese, and reduced the Messenians to the status of helots. With the addition of those tens of thousands of people in Messenia, the total helot population now far outnumbered that of Sparta, whose male citizens at the time amounted to perhaps between eight and ten thousand. The Messenian legend of King Aristodemus dramatically portrayed the terrible sense of loss felt by the Messenians at their fate. They remembered Aristodemus as having sacrificed his beloved daughter to the gods of the underworld in an attempt to win their aid against the invading Spartans. When his campaign of guerrilla warfare at last failed, Aristodemus is said to have slain himself in despair on her grave. Deprived of their freedom and their polis, the Messenian helots were forever after on the lookout for a chance to revolt against their Spartan overlords and regain their ancient freedom.

In their private lives, helots could keep some personal possessions and practice their religion, as slaves in Greece could generally. Publicly, however, helots lived under the constant threat of officially sanctioned violence. Every year the ephors formally declared a state of war to exist between Sparta and the helots, thereby allowing any Spartan to kill a helot without any civil penalty or fear of offending the gods by unsanctioned murder. By beating the helots frequently, forcing them to get drunk in public as an object lesson to young Spartans, setting them apart visually by having them wear dog-skin caps, and generally treating them with scorn, the Spartans consistently emphasized the otherness of the helots compared to themselves. In this way, the Spartans erected a moral barrier between themselves and the helots to justify their harsh treatment of fellow Greeks. For all these reasons, the helots hated the Spartans bitterly.

Their labor made helots valuable to the Spartans. Laconian and Mes-

senian helots alike primarily farmed plots of land belonging to Spartan households, and they were tied to that land in perpetuity. Some helots also worked as household servants. By the fifth century B.C., helots would also accompany Spartan warriors on the march to war, serving as porters for the hoplites' heavy gear and armor. In major conflicts, the Spartans would even arm the helots to use them as soldiers, with the promise of possible freedom as an inducement to valor. The few helots who escaped enslavement in this way were classified as less than full citizens (*neodamodeis*) and existed in a state of social and political limbo, whose details remain obscure. Most helots, however, had no hope of freedom, and their hatred of their masters induced them to revolt whenever they saw a chance for freedom by driving the Spartans out of their land. The historian Xenophon, who knew Sparta well, recorded the feelings of rebellious helots toward the Spartans: "They said they would be glad to eat them raw" (*Hellenica* 3.3.6).

It was the labor of this hostile population, compelled to work as slave farmers to produce food for free Spartans, that allowed Spartan men to devote themselves to full-time training for hoplite warfare in order to protect their city-state from external enemies and to suppress helot rebellions, especially in Messenia. In the words of Tyrtaeus, helots worked "like donkeys exhausted under heavy loads; they lived under the painful necessity of having to give their masters half the food their plowed land bore" (Fragment 6). This compulsory rent of 50 percent of everything produced by the helots working on each free family's land was supposed to amount to seventy measures of barley each year to the male master of the household, and twelve to his wife, along with an equivalent amount of fruit and other produce. In all, this food was enough to support six or seven people. Helots were supposed to exist at a subsistence level; Spartans could be punished if they allowed helots under their control to eat enough to get fat. Contrasting the freedom of Spartan citizens from ordinary work to the awful life of the helots, the Athenian Critias commented, "In Laconia [the territory of Sparta] are the freest of the Greeks, and the most enslaved" (Libanius, *Orations* 25.63 = D.-K. 88B37; cf. Plutarch, *Lycurgus* 28).

#### THE SPARTAN WAY OF LIFE

The entire Spartan way of life was strictly regimented to keep the Spartan army at tip-top strength; individual choice in how to live was not an option. Boys lived at home until only their seventh year, when they were taken away to live in communal barracks with other males until they were thirty. They spent most of their time exercising, hunting, training with

weapons, and being acculturated to Spartan values by listening to tales of bravery and heroism at common meals presided over by older men. The standard of discipline was harsh, with physical and verbal punishment for failure to obey the trainers. The unrelenting pressure to perform and to obey prepared young males for the hard life of a soldier in war. For example, they were not allowed to speak at will. (Our word *laconic*, meaning "of few words," comes from the Greek name for Sparta's territory and the people who lived there.) Boys were also purposely underfed so that they would have to develop the skills of stealth by pilfering food. Yet if they were caught stealing anything, punishment and disgrace followed immediately. One famous Spartan tale taught how seriously boys were supposed to fear such failure: Having successfully stolen a fox, which he was hiding under his clothing, a Spartan youth died because he let the panicked animal rip out his insides rather than be detected in the theft. By the Classical period, older boys would be dispatched for a time to live in the wilds as members of the "Secret Service" (*Krypteia*), whose job was to murder any helots who seemed dangerous enough to murder Spartans or start a rebellion. Spartan men who could not survive the tough conditions of their childhood training fell into social disgrace and did not earn the status of "Those Who are Like One Another; Peers" (*Homoioi*, sometimes translated as "Equals"), the official name for adult males entitled to the full citizen rights of participation in politics and to the respect of the community. Only the sons of the royal family were exempted from this long and harsh education, called the *agoge* ("guidance, training"), to avoid a potential social crisis if a king's son failed to complete the course and therefore fell into disgrace. Dread of failure and the terror of public humiliation were constants in the Spartan way of life; the Spartans built a temple to Fear as a god because they believed that its power held their society together.

Each male citizen who finished the *agoge* had to win admission to a group that dined together at common meals, in a "common mess" (*susition*), each of which had about fifteen members. Applicants were scrutinized by current members of the group, any of whom could blackball the prospective member and force him to look for another common mess to join. Once he passed scrutiny, the new member was admitted on the condition that he contribute a regular amount of barley, cheese, figs, condiments, and wine to the group's meals, taken from the produce provided by the helots working on his family plot. Some meat was apparently contributed, too, because Spartan cuisine was infamous for a black, bloody pork stew condemned as practically inedible by other Greeks. Perhaps it was made from the wild boars Spartan men loved to hunt, an activity for which messmates were formally excused from the compulsory communal

meals. If any member failed to keep up his contributions, he was expelled from the mess and lost his full citizen rights.

The experience of spending so much time in these common messes schooled Sparta's young men in the values of their society. There they learned to call all older men "Father" to emphasize that citizens' primary loyalty was to the community as a whole and not to their genetic families. In the dining groups, young men were chosen to be the special favorites of males older than themselves to build bonds of affection, including physical love, for others at whose side they would have to march into deadly battle. Sparta was one of the Greek city-states that allowed or even encouraged this kind of male homosexual bonding and love between adult and adolescent males; other places prohibited it. There was no single or uniform standard in the Greek world defining appropriate male-on-male sexual behavior, and modern terminology and normative assumptions about sexual behavior often fail to match the complicated reality and diversity of ancient Greek practice, especially in terms of gendered norms. At Sparta, for example, it was acceptable for "fine and good" older women to have same-sex unions with younger women (Plutarch, *Lycurgus* 18); other city-states rejected such relationships. In the messes, Spartan youths also learned to endure the rough joking, even mockery, characteristic of army life in their city-state. In short, a young man's common mess in many ways served both as his long-term school and also as his alternate family while he was growing up. This group of males remained his main social environment even once he had reached adulthood and married. Its function was to mold and maintain his values consistent with the demands of the one honorable occupation for Spartan men: as soldiers obedient to orders and unflinching in the face of danger. Tyrtaeus enshrined the Spartan male ideal in his poetry: "Know that it is good for the polis and the whole people when a man takes his place in the front row of warriors and stands his ground without flinching" (Fragment 12).

Spartan women were renowned throughout the Greek world for their relative freedom. Other Greeks regarded it as scandalous that Spartan girls exercised with boys and did so wearing minimal clothing. Women at Sparta were supposed to use the freedom from labor provided by the helot system to keep themselves physically fit to bear healthy children and raise them to be strict upholders of Spartan values. Their fitness was their beauty, so they wore no makeup. A metaphorical formulation of the male ideal for Spartan women appears, for example, in the late seventh century B.C. in the poetry of Alcman, who wrote songs for the performances of female and male choruses that were common on Spartan civic and religious occasions. The dazzlingly talented and attractive leader of a women's

chous, he writes, "stands out as if, among a herd of grazing cows, someone placed a firmly-built horse with ringing hooves, a prize winner from winged dreams" (Fragment 1). Although Sparta deliberately banned ordinary coined money to discourage the accumulation of material goods, women, like men, could own land privately. Daughters probably inherited portions of land and property equal to one-half of what their brothers would get, but they received their portion earlier, at marriage rather than only upon a parent's death. More and more land came into the hands of women in later Spartan history because the male population declined through losses in war, especially during the Classical Age.

With their husbands so rarely at home, Spartan women directed the households, which included servants, daughters, and sons until they left for their communal training. As a result, women at Sparta exercised more power in the household than did women elsewhere in Greece. Until he was thirty, a Spartan husband was not allowed to live with his family, and even newly wed men were expected to pay only short visits to their brides by sneaking into their houses at night. Spartans believed that this would make their intercourse more energetic and therefore their babies stronger. This tradition was only one of the Spartan customs of heterosexual behavior that other Greeks found bizarre. As already mentioned, if all parties agreed, a married woman with an infertile husband could have children by a man other than her husband, so pressing was the need to reproduce in this strictly ordered society. Other Greeks regarded this arrangement as immoral. Men were legally required to get married, with bachelors subjected to fines and public ridicule. The freedom of Spartan women from some of the restrictions imposed on them in other Greek city-states had the same purpose as this law: the production of manpower for the Spartan army. By the Classical Age, the ongoing problem had become acute of producing enough children to prevent a precipitous decline in the size of the Spartan citizen body. In the end, however, sex at Sparta was not a success. When a giant earthquake in 465 B.C. and then the helot revolt that followed killed an enormous number of Spartans, the population was never able to return to its previous level, because the birth rate remained too low to repair the loss to the city-state's most precious resource, its supply of human beings. Eventually, Spartans failed to bear enough children to keep their once supremely powerful state from shrinking to such a small population that by the later fourth century B.C. their city-state had become inconsequential in international affairs. This change—Sparta falling from its position as the most powerful state in Archaic Age Greece to a bit player in international affairs by the time of Alexander the Great—is perhaps the

clearest evidence from antiquity of the crucial importance of demography to history.

All Spartan citizens were expected to put aside their individual desires and make devotion to their city-state, including having children, their life goal. The situation was pressure filled because Sparta's survival was continually threatened by its own economic foundation, the great mass of helots. Since Sparta's well-being depended on the systematic and violent exploitation of these enslaved Greeks, its entire political and social system by necessity focused like a laser on fierce militarism and conservative values. Change meant danger at Sparta. The Spartans simultaneously institutionalized a form of equality as the basis for their male social unit, the common mess, while denying true social and political equality to ordinary male citizens by making their government a highly limited oligarchy. Other Greeks, though they did not want to live like Spartans, recognized with admiration the Spartans' high respect for their laws as a guide to life in hostile surroundings, a hostility of their own making.

#### THE RISE OF TYRANTS

A desire to avoid the domination of oligarchies brought the first Greek tyrants to power in various Greek states. The most famous early tyranny arose at Corinth around 657 B.C. in opposition to the rule of an oligarchy led by a family called the Bacchiads. Under Bacchiad domination in the eighth and early seventh centuries B.C., Corinth had blossomed into the most economically advanced city in Archaic Greece. The Corinthians had forged so far ahead in naval engineering, for instance, that other Greeks contracted with them to have ships built. Corinth's strong fleet helped the Bacchiads in founding overseas colonies at Corcyra off the northwest coast of Greece and at Syracuse on Sicily, city-states that would themselves become major naval powers.

Despite their role in promoting Corinth's prosperity, the Bacchiads made themselves unpopular because they ruled violently. Cypselus, a member of the social elite whose mother was a Bacchiad, built up support to seize power by becoming popular with the masses: "He became one of the most admired of Corinth's citizens because he was courageous, prudent, and helpful to the people, unlike the oligarchs in power, who were insolent and violent," according to the later historian Nicolaus of Damascus (*Excerpta de insidiis*, p. 20.6 = FGrH 90 F57.4-5). Cypselus engineered the overthrow of Bacchiad rule by rallying support among the non-elite at Corinth and securing an oracle from Delphi favoring his rebellion. After

seizing power, he ruthlessly suppressed rivals, but his popularity with the people remained so high that he could govern without the protection of a bodyguard. Corinth added to its economic strength during Cypselus's rule by exporting large quantities of fine pottery, especially to Italy and Sicily. Cypselus founded additional colonies along the sailing route to the western Mediterranean to promote Corinthian trade in those regions.

When Cypselus died in 625 B.C., his son Periander succeeded him. Periander aggressively continued Corinth's economic expansion by founding colonies on the coasts both northwest and northeast of central Greece to increase trade with the interior regions there, which were rich in timber and precious metals. He also pursued commercial contacts with Egypt for Corinth, an interest commemorated in the Egyptian name Psammetichus, which was given to Periander's nephew. The city's prosperity encouraged flourishing development in crafts, art, and architecture. Remains of the great stone temple to Apollo begun in this period can still be seen today (fig. 5.2). Unlike his father, however, Periander lost the support of Corinth's people by ruling harshly. He kept his power until his death in 585 B.C., but the persisting hostility toward his rule soon led to the overthrow of his successor, Psammetichus. The opponents of tyranny at Corinth thereupon installed a government based on a board of eight magistrates and a council of eighty men.

Greek tyranny represented a distinctive type of rule for several reasons. Although tyrants were by definition rulers who usurped power by force or the threat of force rather than by inheriting it like legitimate kings, they then established family dynasties to maintain their tyranny; they wanted their sons or nephews to inherit their position as the head of state. Also, the men who became tyrants were usually members of the social elite, or at least nearly so, who nevertheless rallied support from ordinary citizens for their coups. In places where men with no property may have lacked citizenship or at least felt substantially disenfranchised in the political life of the city-state, tyrants perhaps won adherents by extending citizenship and other privileges to these poorer parts of the population. Tyrants, moreover, sometimes preserved the existing laws and political institutions of their city-states as part of their rule, thus promoting social stability.

As at Corinth, most tyrannies needed to cultivate support among the masses of their city-states to remain in power because those were the men making up the majority of their armies. The dynasty of tyrants on the island of Samos in the eastern Aegean Sea, for example, who came to power about 540 B.C., built enormous public works to benefit their city-state and provide employment. They began construction of a temple to Hera meant to be the largest in the Greek world, and they dramatically improved the



Fig. 5.2: The city-state of Corinth prospered because it had busy harbors on both sides of the isthmus connecting the Peloponnese peninsula to central Greece. The Corinthians expressed thanks to their patron god Apollo for their good fortune by building him this Doric-style temple with thirty-eight columns in the sixth century B.C. Gianni Dagli Orti / The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY.

water supply of their urban center by excavating a great tunnel connected to a distant spring, whose impressive dimensions can still be seen today. This marvel of engineering, with a channel 8 feet high, ran for nearly a mile through a 900-foot-high mountain. The later tyrannies that emerged in city-states on Sicily similarly graced their cities with beautiful temples and public buildings.

In short, the title "tyrant" in Archaic Greece did not automatically label a ruler as brutal or unwelcome, as the use of the same word in English implies. Greeks evaluated tyrants as good or bad depending on their behavior as rulers. By working in the interests of their peoples, some tyrannies maintained their popularity for decades. Other tyrants quickly experienced bitter opposition from rivals jealous of the tyrant's power, or

they themselves provoked civil war by ruling brutally and inequitably. The poet Alcaeus of the city-state of Mytilene on the island of Lesbos in the northeastern Aegean, himself an opponent of the tyrant of his homeland, described such strife around 600 B.C.: "Let's forget our anger; let's quit our heart-devouring strife and civil war, which some god has stirred up among us, ruining the people but bestowing the glory on Pittacus, our tyrant, for which he prays" (Fragment 70). Since the rulers of tyrannies in Greek city-states exercised great power, and since great power can corrupt even the best of intentions, over time this kind of negative judgment about the quality of the justice imposed by tyrants became common. In this way, tyrants increasingly became seen as "tyrannical" in the modern sense.

### THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF ATHENS

It was a traditional Greek practice to explain significant historical changes, such as the founding of communities or the codification of laws, as the work of an individual "inventor" from the distant past. Just like the Spartans, who remembered the legendary Lycurgus as the founder of their city-state, the Athenians also believed their polis owed its start to a single man. Athenian legends made Theseus responsible for founding the polis of Athens by the synoecism of villages in Attica, the name given to the peninsula at the southeastern corner of the mainland of Greece, which formed the territory of the Athenian polis. Since Attica had several good ports along its coast, the Athenians were much more oriented to seafaring and communication with other peoples than were the almost landlocked Spartans.

Myth described Theseus as a traveling adventurer, whose most spectacular feat was volunteering to sail as a hostage to the island of Crete so that he could defeat the Minotaur, a cannibalistic monster with the body of a man and the head of a bull, to whom young Athenian men and women were fed as expiation of the city-state's killing of the son of King Minos. Like Theseus's other legendary adventures, this exploit became a favorite subject matter for artists. Theseus's "labors," as they are called in imitation of the deeds performed by the most famous Greek hero, Heracles (Hercules to the Romans), were mainly successful fights against monsters and criminals threatening civilized life. They therefore elevated him to the status of a culture hero laboring to promote the social and moral institutions of the city-state. Heracles, by contrast, the hero of Dorian Greeks, was renowned for overcoming monsters and criminals as a demonstration of his supreme physical strength and ability. The legend of Theseus made him a particularly appropriate choice as the founder of a city like Athens

that prided itself on its claim to have taught the most important aspects of civilized life, agriculture and the initiation ceremonies of Demeter, to the rest of the Greek world. The choice of Theseus as the legendary founder of the city-state thus expressed an Athenian feeling of superiority through its claim of having successfully conducted a "civilizing mission" for the early Greek world.

Unlike most other important sites inhabited in the Mycenaean period, Athens had apparently not suffered any catastrophic destruction at the end of the Bronze Age, although it seems unlikely that the settlement entirely escaped the violent disruptions so widespread at that time. In any case, the population of Attica shrank in the early Dark Age, just like the populations of the rest of Greece. By around 850 B.C., however, archaeological evidence, such as the model of grain storage containers from a woman's burial mentioned in chapter 3, implies that the Athenian agricultural economy was reviving. When the population of Attica apparently expanded at a phenomenal rate during the century from about 800 to 700, the free peasants constituted the fastest-growing segment of the population as economic conditions improved in the early Archaic Age. These small agricultural producers apparently began to insist on having a say in making decisions in Athenian policies because they felt that justice demanded at least a limited form of political equality for themselves as citizens. Some of these modest landowners became wealthy enough to afford hoplite armor, and these men, like similarly prosperous men elsewhere, probably made strong demands on the elite, who had up to this time ruled Athens as what amounted to a relatively broad oligarchy. Rivalries among the oligarchs for status and material wealth prevented them from presenting a united front, and they had to respond to these pressures to insure the participation of the hoplites in the citizen militia, on which depended Athenian military strength. The poor were also enfranchised as citizens in early Athens, but we are in no better position in this case than in that of the rest of Greece to explain the precise mechanism powering this significant development. It seems very likely that poorer citizens earned their right to participate politically on the grounds of their service as light-armed troops in the city-state's militia.

Was Athens already on the road toward democracy at this early stage in its political development as a city-state? Scholars disagree strongly on this question, but the evidence, admittedly scarce and obscure as it is, seems to me to indicate that by the late seventh century B.C., Athens's male citizens—rich, hoplite level, and poor together—had established the first form of government in Greece (and therefore in the world) about which we have enough information rightly to call a democracy, or at least the

first major step toward a democracy that admittedly reached its full form only after a long period of change and strife between richer and poorer citizens. It was also admittedly a limited and incomplete form of democratic government. Finally, it was not Greece's only democracy; other Greek city-states (about which we have much less information) also created democracies.

Still, the city-state of Athens as it developed after the Dark Age broke new ground in the organization of politics and society. It remains a difficult problem to understand why, on this interpretation, Athenians moved toward democracy instead of, for example, toward a narrow oligarchy like that of Sparta. Two factors perhaps encouraging the emergence of the Athenian polis as an incipient democracy were rapid population growth and a rough sense of egalitarianism among male citizens surviving from the frontierlike conditions of the early Dark Age, when most people had shared the same meager existence. These same factors, however, do not necessarily differentiate Athens from other city-states that did not evolve into democracies, because the same conditions generally pertained across the Greek world in the late Dark Age and early Archaic Age. Perhaps population growth was so rapid among Athenian peasants that they had greater opportunity than at other places to demand a share in governing. Their power and political cohesion were evident, for example, in about 632 B.C., when they rallied "from the fields in a body" to foil the attempted coup of an Athenian nobleman named Cylon (Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* 1.126.7). A former champion in the Olympics and married to a daughter of Theagenes, tyrant of Megara, Cylon and some of his friends had planned to use force to install a tyranny.

The scanty evidence seems to indicate that by the seventh century B.C. all freeborn adult male citizens of Athens had the right to attend open meetings, in a body called the assembly (*ekklesia*, "a gathering of those who have been called out"), which elected nine magistrates called archons ("rulers") each year. The archons headed the government and rendered verdicts in disputes and criminal accusations. As earlier, the social elite still dominated Athenian political life and exploited their status to secure election for themselves as archons, perhaps by organizing their bands of followers as voters and by making alliances with others of their socioeconomic level. The right of poorer men to serve as members of the assembly as yet had only limited significance because little business besides the election of archons was conducted in its gatherings, which in this period probably took place only rarely, when the current archons decided the time was right.

Political alliances among members of the elite often proved temporary,

however, and rivalries among men jealous of each other's status could become violent. In the aftermath of Cylon's attempted tyranny, an Athenian named Draco was appointed in 621 B.C., perhaps after pressure by the hoplites, to establish a code of laws promoting stability and equity. He infamously made death the penalty for most crimes. The Athenians later remembered his laws as having been as harsh as the meaning of his name (*drakōn*, the Greek word for "dragon, snake"). Athenians, like other Greeks, maintained the death penalty for murder and other serious crimes such as treason, but, for reasons that we cannot recover, Draco's reforms only increased the tension and instability of the political situation at Athens. Deterioration in the economic situation of Athens's peasants, which had been slowly building for a long time, further undermined social peace; hungry farmers were willing to do desperate things to try to feed their families. Later Athenians did not know what had caused this economic crisis that looked likely to flare up into a bloody rebellion, only that it had pitted the rich against the peasants and the poor.

One cause of the trouble may have been that the precariousness of agriculture in this period led to the gradual accumulation of the available farmland in the hands of fewer and fewer people. In subsistence agriculture, the level at which many Athenian farmers operated, a lean year could mean starvation. Moreover, farmers lacked any easy method to convert the surplus of a good year into imperishable capital, such as coined money, which then could be stored up to offset bad years in the future, because coinage was not yet in common use; Athens had yet to mint any currency. Failed farmers had to borrow food and seed from the rich to survive. When they could borrow no more, they had to leave their land to find a job to support their families, most likely by laboring for successful farmers. Under these conditions, farmers who became more effective, or simply more fortunate, than others could acquire the use and even the ownership of the land of failed farmers. Whatever the reasons may have been, many poor Athenians had apparently lost control of their land to wealthier proprietors by around 600 B.C. The crisis became so desperate that impoverished peasants became slaves when they could not pay their debts; economic failure had brought politics to the breaking point.

#### THE REFORMS OF SOLON

Within twenty-five years after Draco's legislation, the conditions of life had become so awful for many poorer Athenians that a civil war threatened to break out. In desperation, the Athenians in 594 B.C. gave Solon special authority to revise the laws on his own to deal with the crisis.

Putting this power in the hands of one man was an extraordinary decision for a city-state whose government was now based on the principle that policies and laws were to be determined by shared decisions made in the assembly. As Solon explains in his autobiographical poetry, he tried to steer a middle course between the demands of the rich to preserve their financial advantages, and the call of the poor for a redistribution of land to themselves from fields that would be seized from the holdings of the large landowners. His famous "shaking off of obligations," as the Athenians called it, somehow (we do not know the details) freed those farms whose ownership had become formally encumbered by debt but did not, however, actually redistribute any land. Solon also prohibited the selling of Athenians into slavery for debt and secured the liberation of citizens who had become slaves in this way, commemorating his success in the verses he wrote about his reforms: "To Athens, their home established by the gods, I brought back many who had been sold into slavery, some justly, some not. . . ." (Fragment 36).

Attempting to balance political power between rich and poor, Solon also instituted a reform that ranked male citizens into four levels according to their income: "five-hundred-measure men" (*pentakosiomedimnoi*, those with an annual income equivalent to that much agricultural produce); "horsemen" (*hippeis*, income of three hundred measures), "yoked men" (*zeugitai*, two hundred measures); and "laborers" (*thetes*, less than two hundred measures). The higher a man's income level, the higher the governmental office for which he was eligible, with *thetes* barred from all posts. Solon did reaffirm the right of this large group of poor men to participate in the assembly, however. Crucially important was Solon's creation of a council (*boulē*) of four hundred men to prepare an agenda for the discussions in the assembly (some scholars date this innovation after Solon's time). Council members were chosen by lottery, probably only from the top three income levels. Still, this innovation mattered because it meant that the elite could not dominate the council's deliberations by setting the agenda ahead of time in ways that privileged matters supporting their own interests to the detriment of the needs of poorer citizens. Solon also probably initiated a schedule of regular meetings for the assembly. All these reforms gave added impact to the assembly's legislative role in the city-state and thus indirectly laid a foundation for the political influence that the *thetes* would gradually acquire at Athens over the next century and a half.

Despite the restriction on officeholding by the lowest income class that he imposed, Solon's classification scheme supported further development of conditions leading to democracy because it allowed for upward social mobility, and the absence of direct taxes on income made it easier for

entrepreneurial citizens to better their lot. If a man managed to increase his income, he could move up the scale of eligibility for office. One man who did so had an inscription erected in the center of Athens along with a statue of a horse to commemorate his elevation from the fourth to the second income level: "Anthemion son of Diphilus set up this dedication to the gods when he exchanged his ranking in the laborer class for one in the horsemen class" (Aristotle, *Constitution of the Athenians* 7). Solon's reforms empowered Athenian male citizens to create, over time, a political and social system far more open to individual initiative and change than that of Sparta.

Equally important to restoring social stability and peace in a time of near-civil war were Solon's judicial reforms. He instituted as a legal right that any male citizen could bring charges on a wide variety of offenses against wrongdoers on behalf of any victim of a crime. Perhaps most importantly, he specified a right of appeal to the assembly by persons who believed a magistrate had rendered unjust legal decisions or verdicts against them. With these two measures, Solon made the administration of justice the concern of all citizens, and not just of the upper-income-level men who filled the official positions of government. He balanced these judicial reforms that favored ordinary people, however, by also granting broader powers to the "Council which meets on the Hill of the god of war, Ares," (Demosthenes *Oration* 20.157); this council is usually just called "The Areopagus" ("Ares' hill"). Archons became members of the Areopagus after their year in office. This body of ex-archons could, if the members chose, exercise great power because at this period it judged the most serious judicial cases, in particular accusations against archons themselves. Solon probably also expected the Areopagus to use its power to protect his reforms.

For its place and time, Athens's political system was remarkable, even at this early stage in its development toward greater democracy, because it granted all male citizens the possibility of participating meaningfully in the making of laws and the administration of justice. But not everyone found the system admirable. A visiting foreign king in the time of Solon reportedly remarked scornfully that he found Athenian democratic government ludicrous. Observing the procedure in the Athenian assembly, he expressed his amazement that leading politicians could only recommend policy in their speeches, while the male citizens as a whole voted on what to do: "I find it astonishing that here wise men speak on public affairs, while fools decide them" (Plutarch, *Solon* 5). Some Athenians who agreed with the king that the wealthy should count as wise and the poor as foolish continued to scheme to undermine Solon's reforms, and such oligar-

chic sympathizers continued to challenge Athenian democracy at intervals throughout its history.

#### FROM TYRANNY TO DEMOCRATIC REORGANIZATION

Solon also made reforms that he hoped would improve economic life, such as prohibiting exports of agricultural products except for olive oil and requiring fathers to train their sons in ways to make a living. Despite his best efforts, however, fierce conflict flared up again at Athens following his reforms, lasting for decades into the mid-sixth century B.C. The conflict sprang from rivalries for office and status among the members of the elite and the continuing discontent of the poorest Athenians. The outcome of this protracted unrest was a tyranny, when a prominent Athenian named Pisistratus began a long and violent effort to make himself sole ruler with the help of wealthy friends and also the poor, whose interests he championed. On his third try in 546 B.C., he finally established himself as tyrant at Athens, protected by a bodyguard. Pisistratus courted poor supporters by providing funds to help peasants acquire needed farm equipment and by offering employment for poorer men on public-works projects, such as road improvements, a huge temple to Zeus, and fountains to increase the supply of drinking water in the city. The tax that he imposed on agricultural production, one of the rare instances of direct taxation in Athenian history, financed the loans to farmers and the construction projects. He also arranged for judicial officials to travel on circuits through the outlying villages of Attica to hear cases, thereby saving farmers the trouble of having to leave their fields to seek justice in the city courts. He left in place Solon's laws and the by-now-traditional institutions of government. Like the earlier tyrants of Corinth, he promoted the economic, cultural, and architectural development of Athens. Athenian pottery, for example, now increasingly crowded out Corinthian wares in the international export trade.

Hippias, the eldest son of Pisistratus, inherited the position of tyrant of Athens after his father's death in 527 B.C. He governed by making certain that his relatives and friends occupied magistracies, but for a time he also allowed rivals from the social elite to serve as archons, thereby defusing some of the tension created by their jealousy of his superior status. Eventually, however, the wealthy family of the Alcmaeonids arranged to have the Spartans send an army to expel Hippias. This startling decision reflected the Spartans' view of themselves that, as Greece's most powerful city-state, they had the duty of protecting the freedom of other Greeks (at least those who were not helots). In the ensuing vacuum of power, the

leading Alcmaeonid, a man named Cleisthenes, sought support among the masses by promising dramatic democratic reforms when his bitterest rival, Isagoras, from another elite family, became archon in 508 B.C. Isagoras tried to block Cleisthenes' reforms by calling on the Spartans to make another military intervention at Athens, this time as his supporters. They responded, evidently having decided that Isagoras was the man to ensure Athens's freedom, given that they regarded democracy not as true liberty but rather as unbridled license propelled by the whim of the masses. In response to this second invasion, the majority of the Athenians united to force Isagoras and his foreign allies out. This remarkable demonstration of resistance by the bulk of the Athenian population put a quick end to the conflict between Athens and Sparta, but the repulse of the proud Spartans by, as they saw it, the Athenian rabble sowed seeds of mutual distrust between the two city-states, which would bear bitter fruit in the wars with one another that broke out two generations later in the mid-fifth century B.C.

The ordinary people's willingness to put their bodies on the battle line to support Cleisthenes' plans for Athenian government gave him the authority to begin to install the even more strongly democratic system for which Athens became famous. The enduring importance of his reforms led later Athenians to think of him as a principal founder of the democracy of the Classical Age. First, he made the preexisting villages of the countryside and the neighborhoods of the city of Athens (both called "demes," *dēmoi*) the constituent units of Athenian political organization. Organized according to deme, male citizens participated directly in the running of their government. To begin with, they kept track in deme registers of which males were citizens and therefore eligible beginning at the age of eighteen to attend the assembly to vote on laws and public policies. Each deme was also assigned according to its location to one of thirty different intermediate groupings called "thirds" (*trittyes*), which were drawn up to represent three territorial areas of Attica (ten thirds each for coast, plain, and city, respectively). Finally, ten administrative divisions called "tribes" (*phylai*) were created by assigning one third from each of the three regional categories to each tribe; these were not kinship groups, despite that implication of the term tribe.

This complex system of dividing up the voting population, which replaced an earlier division into four tribes, thus created ten groups whose members did not all necessarily live near one another. Cleisthenes' rearrangement of the political map of Athenian government meant that local notables no longer could easily control election results just by exercising influence on the poorer people in their immediate area. This effect may have been especially directed at the political power of his oligarchic en-

demes. In any case, the system of ten tribes, each made up of demes from all over Attica, provided an administrative basis for spreading service in Athenian government widely throughout the male citizen body. Especially significant was his reform by which fifty representatives were chosen by lottery from each tribe to serve for one year on a new Council of Five Hundred (replacing Solon's Council of Four Hundred). The number of representatives from each deme was proportional to its population. Most importantly, the ten men who served each year as "generals" (*stratēgoi*), the officials with the highest civil and military authority in the city-state, were elected one from each tribe. The citizen militia was also organized by tribes. Cleisthenes' reorganization was administratively complicated, but its overall goal was to promote less conflict among citizens in the sharing of political power. His full motives for the changes are not easy to discern, but his undermining of existing political alliances among the elite had the undeniable effect of promoting the interests of greater democracy and political stability.

By about 500 B.C., then, Cleisthenes had succeeded in devising a system of government based on direct participation by as many adult male citizens as possible. That he could put such a system in place successfully in a time of turmoil and have it endure and over time become even more democratic, as it did, means that he must have been building on preexisting conditions favorable to direct rather than representative democracy. Certainly, as a member of the social elite looking for popular support, Cleisthenes had good reason to invent the kind of system he thought ordinary people wanted. That he based his system on the demes, the great majority of which were country villages, suggests that some conditions favoring democracy may have stemmed from the traditions of village life. Possibly, the concept of widespread participation in government gained support from the custom that village residents often have of dealing with each other on relatively egalitarian terms. Each man is entitled to his say in running local affairs and must persuade others of the wisdom of his recommendations rather than resorting to compulsion. In the daily affairs of life in a small community, especially the organization and accomplishment of religious festivals and sacrifices, villagers of all statuses, from the poorest peasant to the richest landowner, must for practical reasons deal with each other through negotiation and compromise more often than not, at least if they want to accomplish anything for the group.

Furthermore, since many wealthy Athenian landowners in this period increasingly seem to have preferred to reside primarily in the city (even if they maintained a house in the country as well), they could no longer dominate discussions and affairs in the rural demes as they had when they

lived outside the urban center. In any case, the idea that persuasion, rather than force or status, should constitute the mechanism for political decision making in the emerging Athenian democracy fit well with the spirit of the intellectual changes that were taking place during the late Archaic Age. That is, the idea that people had to present plausible and persuasive reasons for their recommendations corresponded to one of the period's new ways of thought. This development has proved to be one of the most influential legacies of Greek civilization.

#### NEW LITERATURE AND NEW THINKING

Poetry represented the only form of Greek literature until the late Archaic Age. The earliest Greek poetry, that of Homer and Hesiod, had been confined to a single rhythm. A much greater rhythmic diversity characterized the new form of poetry, called lyric, that emerged during the Archaic Age. Lyric poems were far shorter than the narrative epics of Homer or the didactic poetry of Hesiod, and they encompassed many forms and subjects, but they were always performed with musical accompaniment, especially the lyre (a kind of harp that gives its name to the poetry) and a reed instrument called the *aulos*. Choral poets, such as Alcman of Sparta, wrote songs to be performed by groups on public occasions to honor the gods, to celebrate famous events in a city-state's history, to praise victors in athletic contests and wars, and to accompany wedding processions (fig 5.3). Lyric poets writing songs for solo performance on social occasions stressed a personal level of expression on a variety of topics.

The most personal of those topics was the passion of love, and the most famous poet on this topic was Sappho. Born about 630 B.C. on the island of Lesbos, she was already renowned for her poems by the time she was thirty years old. She was forced into exile in faraway Sicily, perhaps because she and her family had opposed the tyrant of her home city-state of Mytilene. Her poems are passionate in describing the psychological effects of love but reticent about physical love, as in this artful lyric about her feelings for another woman:

Equal to the gods appears that one,  
the man sitting close by you now,  
who hears the sound of your sweet voice  
from so close by  
and drinks in your charming laugh. That sight,  
I swear, sets my heart racing;  
the briefest glance at you renders me

### **Guiding Questions for annotation of the reading:**

- 1.** What are the defining cultural qualities of Sparta?
- 2.** What are the specific guidelines that the male citizens of Sparta follow?
- 3.** How does Sparta manage to support its totalistic cultural system? Describe the system of slavery they employ.
- 4.** Identify the *krypteia*, the notion of the *homoioi*, and the *agoge*.
- 5.** How do these cultural qualities inform the sort of government that they run?
- 6.** How is tyranny different from a monarchy?
- 7.** Explain how many tyrannies in Greece were supported by the masses against the upper class.
- 8.** What are some of the "positive" qualities of a tyranny? The negative ones?
- 9.** Where would tyranny lie on the spectrum of government, from authoritarian to democratic or anarchic?
- 10.** Explain the significance of Solon's reforms in Athens.
- 11.** How did Cleisthenes dramatically promote the development of democracy?
- 12.** What are the defining features of Athenian democracy?
- 13.** Explain the notion of why *persuasion* was critical to the integrity of Athenian democracy.